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ABSTRACT

The demands of the job of an academic chair are varied, numerous, and often frustrating and unrewarding. Long-term chairs, those with 5 to 20 years of experience, usually work through a period of deciding whether to resign or attempt renewal. Since the continuity and commitment of a long-term chair can be a valuable asset for an institution, encouraging renewal is a worthy staff development investment for a college. Departmental chair renewal begins by examining the three roles that a chair plays: academic, managerial, and leadership. Academically, chairpersons must keep abreast of developments in their discipline, fulfill their roles as faculty members, and encourage the use of new teaching methodologies to improve learning. As managers, chairs must attend to such time-consuming tasks as creating schedules, staffing classes, and hiring and supervising faculty. As leaders, chairs are expected to motivate a department and provide a vision for the future. The danger for chairpersons lies in the fact that the number and urgency of managerial tasks often leaves little time to address leadership and academic function. Chair renewal can be regarded as a three-step process: (1) reflective self-examination, in which chairs assess their values and the various attributes of their position; (2) evaluating the institutional commitment to departmental chairs; and (3) making decisions and taking action. (MAB)

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SEASONED CHAIRS AND DEANS CAN LEARN NEW TRICKS

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Gerry Welch has been associated with St. Louis Community college since 1975. She received both bachelor and master's degrees in economics and has taken additional graduate work in both economics and education.

Gerry Welch holds the rank of associate professor of economics and has been a full-time faculty member in the Department of Business/Economics on the Meramec campus of St. Louis Community College. She served as chair of this department from the early 1980s until August 1994 when she accepted a one-year position as administrative intern to the vice chancellor for education. Gerry also was acting associate dean of instruction for curriculum development at Meramec from 1992-1993. She is currently the coordinator of the strategic planning process for the district.

Gerry Welch is a graduate of the National Community College Chair Academy Institute for Academic Leadership. She was a member of the second year class and completed this yearlong program in June 1994.

In addition to her teaching and administrative experiences, Gerry is the co-author (with Patrick J. Welch) of *Economics: Theory & Practice*, a one-semester introduction to economics textbook that has been published this year in its fifth edition by Dryden/Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.

"SEASONED CHAIRS AND DEANS CAN LEARN NEW TRICKS"

or

"CHAIR AND DEAN RENEWAL"

"Fetch." "Roll over." "Beg." "Play dead." "Please pat me on the head." These expressions are typically identified with canine friends. But, if you associate these with your job as department chair or dean, read on.

The demands of the job of an academic chair are varied, numerous, and often frustrating and unrewarding. As a consequence, chairs tend to experience significant "burnout". Long term chairs--5-20 plus years--usually work through a period of trying to decide whether to resign or attempt renewal. Since the continuity and commitment of a long-term chair can be a valuable asset for an institution, encouraging renewal is a worthy staff development investment for a college. The following article provides some reasons for burnout and some steps that can be taken for renewal.

Chair Responsibilities

Department chair renewal begins by examining the three roles that a chair plays: academic, manager, and leader. Community colleges expect chairs to perform in each of these roles, and each role places different demands on chairs, taps unique talents, and uses distinct skills. In short, the typical department chair wears three very different hats.

Academic Role

Most chairpersons are fundamentally academics. Having earned a graduate degree in a field, the typical chair enters an institution as a faculty member, becomes a chair, and continues to teach several courses while serving as chair. Classroom creativity, interest in a discipline, and perhaps some research or writing were likely motivators in the decision to seek a teaching career.

Chairpersons are expected to expand their academic interests by serving as role models for faculty in a department. Keeping abreast of developments in the discipline they represent, and encouraging new teaching methodologies and innovations to improve learning are also typical chair responsibilities.

Managerial Role

The functions of the chair as manager are different from those of the academic. They tend to be numerous, require a task orientation, and provide little opportunity for independence and creativity. As a manager, a chair

schedules and staffs classes, hires and supervises faculty and staff, links the department to other areas of the college, fills out endless forms, deals with student needs, creates and maintains budgets, and, in general, ensures that the department complies with institutional procedures.

Chairs may find that this role consumes their time and energy. Urgency governs the response to multiple requests from internal and external constituents. Furthermore, chairs who sought an academic faculty position may not have the training to successfully function in this role.

Leadership Role

As a leader, a chair is expected to keep department morale high, motivate faculty to perform, have a vision for the future, and move the department forward in responding to institutional mandates and external challenges.

This extremely important role affects the future of individual faculty and the department. If a career area changes and courses are no longer relevant, or the department does not meet new needs of the community and students, or is inflexible in its view of the future, faculty members could face serious employment consequences.

The danger in the chair position is that the plethora and urgency of managerial tasks leaves little time to address the functions of the other two roles. Over time, the academic and leadership roles can take second place or, in some cases, may be completely ignored. Chair burnout may result from frustration associated with an inability to adequately address the functions of an academic and a leader. A chair may be discouraged by a lack of time to keep up in a field, experiment with new classroom methodologies, or institute a process of department planning. The inner self of the department chair may be buried in paperwork.

Chair Renewal

Chair renewal can be regarded as a three-step process. First, a chair should invest time in a serious, reflective reexamination of self--not a time management study to improve efficiency in the accomplishment of tasks, but an evaluation of fundamental values and principles. Second, there should be an examination of the commitment to chairs at the institution. Are chairs receiving the institutional support and encouragement necessary to carryout their responsibilities? Third, a chair should take time to make serious decisions about actions that could result in a more satisfying work experience.

Reflective Self-examination

The process of renewal begins with reflective thinking on the part of the chair about the job and whether it is professionally and personally fulfilling. There

are several ways to accomplish this.

A commitment to work through Stephen Covey's thoughtful and inspirational 1994 book, *First Things First,*[1] is an easy way to engage in reflective thinking. Covey's book begins with a focus on the distinction between the inner compass of values and principles and the clock of tasks and urgencies that direct people's lives. The trap of following the clock and neglecting the compass can cause frustration and even lead to an "Urgency Addition."

Covey provides methods to "keep the main thing the main thing". A simple four quadrant chart, reprinted below, is just one example of the tools provided to help the reader think about choices regarding how time is spent.[2]

I **Urgent** **Important**	**II** **Not Urgent** **Important**
*Crises *Pressing problems *Deadline-driven projects, meetings, preparations	*Preparation *Prevention *Values clarification *Planning *Relationship building *True re-creation *Empowerment
III **Urgent** **Not Important**	**IV** **Not Urgent** **Not Important**
*Interruptions, some phone calls *Some mail, report *Some meetings *Many proximate, pressing matters *Many popular activities	*Trivia, busywork *Junk mail *Some phone calls *Time wasters *"Escape" activities

Another powerful tool for reexamination and reflective thinking is journaling. Journaling is a useful strategy for examining a person's professional and personal values, roles, attitudes, and beliefs. A commitment to write engages one in reflective thinking and self-dialogue.

A journal provides a record of how time is spent and a sense of cycles, patterns, relationships, health, and emotions. A journal should be personal,

entries written weekly or more often, and little attention devoted to composition "rules". Several excellent publications on the journaling process are available.[3]

Finally, another useful reexamination tool is the Myer-Briggs personality inventory. If you have not taken this inventory, it can provide useful insights and understanding of personal behavior styles.

Institutional Commitment

A second step in the renewal process it to evaluate the institutional commitment to chairs at the college. Burnout and frustration may be the result of institutional factors in relationship to the chair's job.

In examining an institutional commitment one should answer the following questions. Does a chair job description that is up-to-date and relevant to the functions performed by the chair exist? Is the chair evaluated regularly and fairly with regard to the performance indicators in the chair job description? Are the roles of the chairs and deans clearly delineated? What is the expectation of the college with regard to the chair's performance and what is the expectation of the chair's colleagues? Are these expectations similar? What types of staff development activities have been provided for chairs? Has training for the managerial and leadership roles of the chair been provided? What type of reward is provided for outstanding chairs?

Decision Making and Action

Reflective thinking and the review of institutional commitment should provide answers to whether a chair will continue to serve in that capacity. If a decision is made to remain as chair, plans for renewal and change should accompany that decision. A commitment to change a daily routine to provide time to accomplish truly important matters, or to build a network and team with other chairs to obtain institutional commitment are two such activities.

Notes

1. Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994.

2. Covey, Merrill, and Merrill, page 37.

3. See, for example, K. Adams, *Journey to the Self*, Time Warner, 1990.